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TO: City Planning Commission

FROM: Christopher Gulock, Staff

RE: **Request of the Planning and Development Department to amend the Future General Land Use map of the Detroit Master Plan of Policies for the Indian Village area of Neighborhood Cluster 3 for the portion of Gabriel Richard Park containing the R. Thornton Brodhead Naval Armory**

DATE: February 1, 2021

NATURE OF REQUEST

A public hearing at the City Planning Commission (CPC) will be held at 5:15 PM on February 4, 2021 to consider the request of the Planning and Development Department (P&DD) to amend the Future General Land Use Map of the Detroit Master Plan of Policies for the Indian Village area of Neighborhood Cluster 3 for the portion of Gabriel Richard Park containing the R. Thornton Brodhead Naval Armory (Brodhead Armory). The P&DD report and request are attached for reference.

P&DD is requesting to amend the Master Plan future land use map for property containing the Brodhead Armory, generally located on the south side of East Jefferson Avenue between Townsend Street (extended) and Baldwin Street (extended), from “PRC” Recreation to “INST” Institutional. The request is being made to allow for the adaptive reuse of the Broadhead Armory. The City of Detroit has received a request from the Detroit Parade Company to purchase and redevelop the site.

BACKGROUND

Existing Building

The Brodhead Armory located at 7650 East Jefferson Avenue was built in 1930 as a training center and barracks for Michigan’s military reserves.

The existing building includes the following: the front vestibule facing Jefferson Avenue, the center main drill hall, and three-story office section at the south end of the building. The footprint of the existing Armory covers about 87,000 square feet. The site includes a semi-circular drive along E. Jefferson Avenue, a 46-space surface parking lot at the south side of the building, and a rear loading dock area. The area between the rear loading area and Detroit River measures about 275 feet in width and includes a variety of trees, bushes, and grass.

In 2003, the federal government decided to discontinue use of the building as an armory and the City agreed to take ownership of the building. Soon thereafter, pipes burst within the building causing extensive damage, and over the years, the building has been damaged by vandals, scrappers, and the elements.

2008 Proposal

In 2008, the City, after marketing the property, agreed to sell the vacant Armory to a developer who proposed to renovate the building as an entertainment/sports training facility. The training facility was to include a boxing facility and fitness program, and the entertainment venue was to include a bowling alley, outdoor driving range, etc. In June 2008, in order to allow this development project to move forward, the Detroit City Council rezoned the Armory and adjacent land, containing 4.7 acres, from a R6 (High Density Residential District) to a SD4 (Special Development District, Riverfront Mixed) zoning district. Additionally, in July 2008, the City amended the Detroit Master Plan of Policies future land use designation from MP (Major Park) to SRC (Special Residential-Commercial).

However, the proposed entertainment/sports training facility never materialized, and the building has remained vacant. In 2009, when the City approved a comprehensive update of Detroit Master Plan of Policies, the Brodhead Armory site was designated as Recreation (PRC) with the rest of Gabriel Richard Park. It appears to CPC staff that the earlier amendment to SRC in 2008 was accidentally not included in the City-wide Master Plan update.

Historic Designation

The Armory's architecture consists of a mix of Art Modern and Art Deco influences. The building includes several historic features including decorative tile work, stonework details, and nautically themed artwork done under the Works Progress Administration (WPA) under the New Deal. The interior of the building houses the largest collection of federally-funded Depression-era artwork of any building in the state. The Brodhead Armory is on the National Register of Historic Places and has a local historic designation. Any modifications to the structure require approval by the Detroit Historic District Commission.

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

For the past several years, the Administration has entertained various proposals to redevelop the Armory. The marketing of the building was recently turned over to the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation (DEGC), and the City has received a request from the Detroit Parade Company to purchase the site.

The Parade Company is presently located at 9500 Mt. Elliott, an industrial area northeast of the GM Detroit-Hamtramck Assembly Plant. The Parade Company currently runs the Ford Fireworks, Thanksgiving Parade, Hob Nobble Gobble, and Turkey Trot, and helps to facilitate events such as Detroit River Days. The Detroit Parade Company indicates it has been evaluating sites for a new headquarters for the past nine years. The Parade Company indicates its present and future plans necessitate a building with 130,000 square feet (containing a 25 to 30 feet high-bay area for the production and storage of floats, big heads and costumes) and an additional 30,000 square feet for offices and events. The Parade Company is interested in the Brodhead site for its accessible, attractive, and historic location.

The Parade Company is proposing to rehabilitate the north end of the building (the vestibule and drill hall), which would contain about 30,600 square feet. This building is 35 feet high and about 199 feet deep. This area would include a grand lobby/event space, offices, etc.

Because of the height constraints and existing layout, the Parade Company is proposing to demolish the three-story south half of the Armory and construct a new 130,300 square foot addition. Because of the grade changes on the property as one approaches the River, the rear addition would include a lower level for float storage and assembly and an upper main level to include a design studio, float storage and employee services. The new addition would measure 396 feet long and 50 feet high at the Jefferson Ave. grade.

The Parade Company is also proposing exterior artwork to enliven the façade, landscaping, and an exterior plaza at south side of the building with a connection to the future Riverwalk. Attached please find a site plan, floor plans, and elevations for the proposed project. The Parade Company is proposing to salvage the historic interior elements of the south end of the site to display in the rehabilitated and new facility.

The Parade Company estimates total project costs of \$36.6 million, and once the development is approved, it will initiate a fundraising campaign.

ANALYSIS

Surrounding Master Plan, Zoning, and Land Uses

- North:** Master Plan (High Density Residential); Zoning (PD, Planned Development); Land Use (apartments)
- East:** Master Plan (High Density Residential); Zoning (R6, High Density Residential); Land Use (apartments)
- South:** Master Plan (Recreation); Zoning (R6); Land Use (riverfront)
- West:** Master Plan (Recreation); Zoning (R6 & Parks & Recreation, PR); Land Use (parkland)

Land Use Regulations

The Buildings, Safety Engineering and Environmental Department (BSEED) indicates the current legal use of the property is an Armory. BSEED has determined the proposed Parade Company facility qualifies as a non-profit neighborhood center, which is permitted by-right in SD4, and a warehouse/storage building which is conditional in SD4. The outdoor plaza at the south end of the site would be a permitted accessory use. Since the site exceeds three acres, City Council will have authority to take final action on the development and site plan.

Community Feedback

In early October 2020, CPC staff sent letters, as required by State law, to adjacent cities informing them of the proposed Master Plan change and requesting comments. To date, CPC staff have not received any comments from adjacent cities.

On January 26, 2021, the City of Detroit Department of Neighborhoods District 5 hosted a virtual community meeting to present the proposed Master Plan amendment and sale of the Brodhead Armory. Members of the nearby Charlevoix Village Association asked questions about the project related to the overall total investment and parking. Several veterans from the Brodhead Association spoke in opposition to the land sale. This group indicates it has an

alternative \$100 million plan to save the entire building for veteran activities, which could include a new residential tower for veterans.

The CPC received a letter dated January 22, 2021 from the Brodhead Armory Preservation Society, Inc. The group is opposed to saving just a portion of the building and supports that the entire building and its historic interiors be preserved.

The CPC received a letter dated January 27, 2021 from the Detroit Art Deco Society. The group opposes demolition of the entire south block of the building. The group is also opposed to the removal of the plaster WPA murals and installing them at another location.

Attachments

cc: Karen Gage, P&DD
Greg Moots, P&DD